

Lithium with Iodine 131 Treatment



This handout will help you to understand how **Lithium** and **Iodine-131** (I-131) work together in your body to treat thyroid cancer. If you have had I-131 in the past and need to take it again, your doctor may want you to take a medication that has the special ability to help the I-131 work better. The **Lithium** is given as a pill along with the I-131 and improves what the I-131 can do alone.

Here's how it works. Iodine-131 is attracted to thyroid cells. The attraction is something like water to a sponge. I-131 can destroy thyroid cells that are left behind after surgery. But if I-131 leaves the body too fast not all the thyroid cancer cells are destroyed. The Lithium helps I-131 stay in your body a little longer so cancer cells have more time to absorb the I-131.

When would I start taking Lithium pills?

You will start to take the Lithium pills 1 (one) week before taking the initial I-131 **tracer** dose. The tracer dose I-131 is a low dose of radioactive Iodine that helps your doctor make decisions about your future treatment. Two days later, you will take a second dose of I-131. This is a higher dose, called the therapy dose. It might be taken in the hospital where you will stay one or two days while the radioactive Iodine-131 leaves your body. Approximately 2 weeks after taking the therapy dose of I-131, you will stop taking the Lithium pills.

How should I schedule my medications and Iodine -131 Therapy?

You will have help to schedule your medications and therapy. Your doctor will make sure you have detailed instructions about your medication schedule. You will have dates written down for when to start and stop your thyroid and lithium medication. The schedule will also include the dates for both the Iodine-131 tracer and therapy dose. Your doctor may have you to go to a clinic to have your blood drawn. These dates will also be included with your written instructions.

You may find it helpful to take a calendar and write in the dates and times for your medications, Iodine-131 treatments, and clinic appointments. This can help you keep track of the treatment and stay on schedule.

Are there side effects to taking Lithium pills?

Most medications have side effects. When Lithium is taken as directed, there are usually few side effects. If side effects occur most are very mild and will go away when you stop taking the medication.

Some people feel tired and sleep more. Some may have slowed thinking, talking, or have less ability to focus attention or concentrate. The mild side effects of Lithium may be similar to the symptoms caused by the lack of thyroid medication. However, medications affect people differently. What one person may experience, another may not when taking Lithium.

For more information

Ask for further patient education material on Lithium, or on Iodine-131 Therapy. And, you can talk to your doctor and your pharmacist about this use of this drug. Please ask any questions you have and staff will help you connect with information you need.

If you would like more written information, please call the Library for Health Information at (614)293-3707. You can also make the request by e-mail: health-info@osu.edu.

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